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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [RS](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: GOR PROTESTS KUZNETSOV DETENTION BY GEORGIA

Classified By: A/DCM Alice G. Wells for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

GOR manufactures outrage

11. (SBU) The Russian MFA has sharply protested the detention of Nashi activist Aleksandr Kuznetsov by Georgian authorities on April 16, claiming the Georgian administration was "trying to accuse its external enemy, Russia, of everything" in claiming Kuznetsov had traveled to Georgia to plan provocations. Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrei Nesterenko, issuing a travel warning April 17 for Georgia on the grounds that Russian travelers might "become a target of amoral and disgusting provocations of Georgian security services," suggested Georgian special forces were under instruction to extract "proof" at any cost for Russian interference in Georgian internal affairs.

12. (SBU) Chairman of the State Duma Youth Affairs Committee Pavel Tarakanov repeated Kuznetsov's claims that he had legally entered Georgia to promote friendship between the peoples of Georgia, South Ossetia and Russia via a joint motor race, and allegedly been beaten and forced to provide false testimony about planning provocations. Echoing Nesterenko, Tarakanov asserted that the Saakashvili government, unable to solve its domestic problems, had staged the event to present Russia as "an enemy guilty of all Georgian misfortunes."

Nashi engagement in Georgian anti-government protests

13. (SBU) On April 17, about 300 Nashi members gathered in front of the Georgian embassy in Moscow to demand the release of Kuznetsov. Nashi leader Nikita Borovikov was careful to accuse "Georgian authorities, not the Georgian people" of the arrest and insisted Russia wanted to "be friends with the Georgian people," while demonstrators waved banners stating "Russians, Georgians are brothers forever!", or "Friendship between Russians and Georgians - only in this way will we win." Nashi youth movement spokesperson Kristina Potupchik asserted Kuznetsov's testimony of "preparing provocations" could only have been obtained by "threatening Kuznetsov's life."

Ekho Moskvyy pokes holes

14. (SBU) While Kuznetsov's allegedly forced testimony and the Nashi protests in Moscow were widely shown on TV, the print press did not devote much attention to his plight. Radio station Ekho Moskvyy touched upon the issue twice over the weekend, posing the question whose version of events listeners thought more trustworthy, the Georgian or Russian MFA's. 92 percent of the mostly liberal-leaning listeners voted for the Georgian view through the internet. Poking

holes in the Russian story, Ekho Moskvyy noted the belated reaction of both the Russian MFA with its statement, and of Nashi with its protests that took place after Kuznetsov was already released into Russian hands. With a view to Kuznetsov's speedy release without any charges leveled, Kremlin critic Yuliya Latynina in a second Ekho Moskvyy program doubted the veracity of his allegations of threats to his life, and noted Kuznetsov's confirmation of widespread rumors that Vladimir Surkov from the Presidential Administration helped finance Nashi.

Comment

15. (C) While only a few liberal outlets such as Ekho Moskvyy challenged the official version of events surrounding Kuznetsov's detention, the reluctance of the major print press to follow the story likely reflects the lack of credibility that the MFA's position enjoys.
RUBIN